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FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4525  
INFO RUEHEE/ARAB LEAGUE COLLECTIVE  
RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE  
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 3609  
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO 3812  
RHMFISS/CDR USCENCOM MACDILL AFB FL  
RHEHAAA/NSC WASHDC  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L BEIRUT 000350

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR NEA/FO, NEA/ELA  
ALSO FOR IO ACTING A/S WARLICK  
P FOR DRUSSELL, RRANGASWAMY  
USUN FOR WOLFF/GERMAIN/SCHEDLBAUER  
NSC FOR SHAPIRO, MCDERMOTT  
DOD/OSD FOR FLOURNOY/KAHL/DALTON  
DRL/NESA FOR WHITMAN, BARGHOUT

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/24/2019

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SUBJECT: LEBANON: ELECTIONS SNAPSHOT: BATROUN

Classified By: Ambassador Michele J. Sison for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

#### SUMMARY

11. (SBU) This is the fourteenth in a series of snapshots we will produce for key electoral districts ("qada") in the run-up to the Jun 7, 2009 parliamentary elections.

12. (C) Batroun is a small district with only two seats, both designated for Maronite Christians and both currently held by March 14 MPs. In-fighting among March 14 Christians, however, could cost the coalition one of the two seats. Current March 14 MP Boutros Harb is almost certain to retain his seat. However, two Christian parties within March 14 -- Lebanese Forces, which currently holds the second seat, and Kataeb -- are vying to name the other candidates for the second deputy slot. The in-fighting could lead them to each name a candidate, which would dilute the pro-March 14 votes and increase the election prospects for Telecommunications Minister Gebran Bassil, son-in-law of opposition Christian Free Patriotic Movement leader Michel Aoun. End summary.

#### BATROUN: A BRIEF OVERVIEW

13. (U) Over 90 percent of Batroun's residents are Christians, and almost three-fourths of the main city's population are Maronites. There are two seats in Batroun, both designated for Maronite Christians, and currently held by March 14. Lebanese Forces (LF) holds one of the seats, and its deputy, MP Antoine Zahra, intends to run again. MP Boutros Harb, independent yet affiliated with March 14, is also defending his seat.

14. (SBU) The Batroun district houses several cement factories and the Selaata port with an accompanying industrial zone, and has an agricultural community producing olives, lemons, and greenhouses. The city of Batroun, a charming coastal city in northern Lebanon, is said to be one of the oldest cities in the world, and was mentioned in the famous Tell al-Amarna letters of the 14th century B.C. Today, the city is a popular tourist destination for its Roman and Phoenician structures, its beaches, and its nightclubs.

FACTORS AT PLAY  
IN PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS

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¶5. (C) Analysts deem Batroun one of several districts "too close to call" at this point because divisions within March 14 could affect its performance at the polls. While Harb is certain to run and retain his seat, March 14 parties Kataeb and LF are both vying to run their candidates for the second seat. Kataeb nominated Samer Saadeh, son of former Kataeb leader George Saadeh, to run, while Zahra hopes to compete again as LF's candidate. If both candidates run, they will draw votes away from each other.

¶6. (C) On the opposition side, Telecommunications Minister and Free Patriotic Movement Michel Aoun's son-in-law, Gebran Bassil, has confirmed he will challenge March 14 in Batroun. Bassil is not seen as popular on his own merit, but he could benefit from March 14 Christian in-fighting. Moreover, former Kataeb member Dr. Nabil Hokayem, who is locally popular, has insisted he will run in the elections, which would also take votes away from the March 14 candidates.

SISON